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Disinformation: Iraq, the United Nations (UN), and the United States Government (USG)

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Author: Editor

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Abstract. This article describes components of alleged disinformation propagated by the Iraqi government concerning the USG in the context of UN inspection teams established pursuant to the Persian Gulf War of 1991.

The Iraqi government has claimed that US members of UN inspection teams and US intelligence authorities processing U-2 overflight data are "spies" and are providing deliberately misleading information to ensure that Iraq never meets the criteria necessary to remove UN-sponsored sanctions--at least as long as Saddam Hussein is running the country. USG spokespersons have denied the allegations and have termed the allegations to be disinformation. If the allegations were correct, of course, the USG would be engaged in disinformation.

If the Iraqi allegations are indeed untrue--i.e., bad information--they should still be considered good disinformation for several reasons. (1) The USG certainly has used disinformation in the past concerning events in other countries--as have other countries as well. (2) The USG has employed disinformation in the past concerning the U-2, e.g., the Francis Gary Powers shootdown. (3) The disinformation in (2) was provided within a UN context. (4) A strong case can be made that the USG does not desire UN-sponsored sanctions against Iraq to end until Saddam Hussein is no longer in power. (5) Representatives of the USG, and other countries as well, often "spin" and "shape" raw data to be consonant with policy--a continual problem for intelligence bureaucracies concerned with getting truthful information to policymakers. (6) At least some UN countries that desire to profit from Iraqi oil need Iraqi oil for energy, or are owed money or oil by the Iraqi government are looking for pretexts to weaken sanctions or doing away with the sanctions all together. Thus, there are those who are primed to believe or look like they believe the allegations. (7) The length of time the sanctions have been operative--about 7 years--and the posited changes in time perception in an era of globalization are leading still other UN members to be more flexible about weakening or disestablishing sanctions. (8) Many Arab countries and their allies are looking for pretexts to weaken or end the sanctions because of (a) regional realignments, (b) political power redistributions, (c) alleged displeasure with the nature of peace deliberations between the Israeli Government (IG) and the Palestinian National Authority, (d) the recent IG assassination attempt in Jordan, and (e) alleged IG intransigence towards the Palestinians. (9) Doubt about whether to believe or not to believe the allegations or their denials can be titrated through (a) multiple levels of and accesses to information from various sources; (b) multiple belief systems and modes of processing information within cultures, societies, organizations, groups, and individuals; (c) self and other deception processes within (b); and (d) stories about real or alleged events occurring far from most governmental and mass media outlets. (10) Social psychological research suggests that (a) innuendoes--even when retracted--often leave behind significant psychological effect, (b) first impressions are often resistant to change, and (c) perceptual processes seem to function by accepting all percepts as initially true before further interpretive and elaborative analysis. (11) There is a reasonable probability that US members of UN teams and UN activities are debriefed by intelligence personnel.

In the context of the above, crafting and transmitting information--disinformation or otherwise--to support removing US members of UN inspection teams seems a reasonable pursuit. Disinformation

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about disinformation has much to recommend it. (See Bogart, L. (1976). *Premises for propaganda: The United States Information Agency's operating assumptions in the Cold War*. NY: Free Press; Crossette, B. (November 8, 1997.) Iraq stands fast on ban of U.S. arms inspectors. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Hazan, B.A. (1976). *Soviet propaganda: A case study of the Middle East conflict*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction; Jowett, G.S. (1987). *Propaganda and communication: The re-emergence of a research tradition*. *Journal of Communication*, 37, 97-114; Joyeux, B., Cave, F., Durandin, G., & Feertchak, H. (1979). A method for studying values in propaganda messages. *Annee Psychologique*, 79, 181-195; Silverstein, B. (1987). Toward a science of propaganda. *Political Psychology*, 8, 49-59; Whittaker, J.O. (1997). Psychological warfare in Vietnam. *Political Psychology*, 18, 165-179.) (Keywords: Disinformation, Perception Management, Propaganda.)